2: Karsten E-5 (1911-1913)1932 SI7 Mataco SI7

Chapter VII.

Abortion and infanticide.

The custom of infanticide has already been touched upon, and as a matter of fact it is found among all Chaco tribes. The Indians do not consider a new-born child an independent personality, and it is looked upon as being so entirely the property of the parents that these have full right to do with it what they like. If for some reason or other the parents do not like to keep it they can destroy it, and such cases are by no means rare. Still it is necessary to point out certain facts with regard to infanticide as practised by the Indians, since the custom has not seldom been misunderstood by Europeans. The Indians do not kill their children from a lack of natural parental feelings; on the contrary, it must be emphasized that the savage Indian loves his offspring just as tenderly as do civilized people. Further, the Indians do not kill normal children except in such comparatively rare cases as those mentioned in the last chapter. A regular custom of killing for instance new-born female children does not exist. Infanticide is mainly practised in the case of children who are born in some way abnormal or under abnormal circumstances. In the first place it is superstitious fear that induces the Indian to kill his children. According to the Indian idea monstrous or in some way deformed children, or children which in general are born very sickly, cannot have been conceived in a natural way; they must have come into being through the operation of a demon. Indian myths, to which I shall refer later on, have much to tell about women who became pregnant in a supernatural way, during bathing or otherwise, and in consequence gave birth, not to a human child, but to a monster. Such a monster is looked upon with horror and regarded as a most ominous thing not only for the family concerned but for the whole village. It is an evil spirit that is born in the midst of the Indians and which will visit the whole community with sick-

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been told about a Toba or a Pilaga who killed himself. Apparently, suicide is a culture trait restricted to the Matako.

Can this pathological condition be attributed to the life in the mission and to the discipline imposed upon the natives who have shown willingness to become Christians? The psychological motivation for conversion is undoubtedly fear of the white men and hunger. The missions are a buffer between the Indians and the ruthless white colonists. In the missions the Indians find jobs and, in case of distress, food. They also receive free medical treatment. The price they must pay for these privileges is to give up dancing and drinking, to abandon warfare and native sports and to forget shamanism. In addition they are expected to go to church twice daily and the children and many adults spend part of the day in school. Life under such conditions is extremely dull. All the activities that made life worth while disappear unless they can secretly play hockey or indulge in a drinking bout. This, of course, they quite frequently do. Although their present situation can explain their indifference, their anxieties and their lack of attachment to life, can the mission discipline be held responsble for the Metako suicidal mania?

In six of the cases cited above, marital maladjustment was blamed for the suicide attempt. In one case, the suicide was attributed to lack of sexual gratification. One couple attempted suicide because of the insults showered upon them by an angry and frustrated woman. One case may be ascribed both to sexual maladjustment and fear (the case of Martin). Criticism by neighbors is the cause in one instance. In only one case that of the old woman who had lost her son, can grief be considered the determining reason for the suicide.

In addition, there is no doubt that suicide among these people has a decidedly aggressive character. The Matako use suicide as a threat; by killing themselves, they punish the person who has offended them. The punitive character of suicide leads to the problem of aggression and aggressiveness among these people. In daily life little direct aggression is shown in their mutual relations. There are almost no quarrels; ordinarily men are not harsh to the women. Children are coddled and are seldom scolded. Nevertheless, strong aggresive tendencies exist. Whoever has witnessed a hockey party on the Pilcomayo loses any illusion he may have had about the gentleness and softness of Matako manners. In its brutality and fierceness each hockey party resembles a pitched battle. The Indians paint themselves and dress as if they were getting ready to face a real enemy. The teams are formed by men who are related by blood or who live in the same community. The adversaries are frequently members of bands which are on unfriendly